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ABSTRACT

The Iowa Prekindergarten/Kindergarten Task Force prepared this report in response to the following charges: to develop recommendations for strengthening existing kindergarten programs and to design a plan for implementing appropriate prekindergarten programs. Among the report's recommendations are that: (1) the Iowa Department of Education establish prekindergartens for four-year-olds; (2) kindergarten and prekindergarten programs be tailored to the needs of each child; and (3) district kindergarten programs meet the report's guidelines before programs for four-year-olds are implemented. The report begins with a rationale for public school for four-year-olds. This is followed by a position statement on high quality, developmentally appropriate kindergarten and prekindergarten programs. Guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices in prekindergarten and kindergarten follow. Also provided are specific recommendations for the areas of personnel, eligibility and placement, program structure, facilities and equipment, curriculum, adult-child interaction, teaching strategies, assessment of children, and home and program partnership. The final section of the report consists of guidelines for a model for delivery of prekindergarten programs, and includes a presentation of the model, a discussion of funding, listings of facilities and equipment needs, and suggested standards for program evaluation. Included are 18 references. (SKC)

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PREKINDERGARTEN/KINDERGARTEN

TASK FORCE

REPORT

Submitted to:

THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

OCTOBER 1987

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, increasing attention in Iowa has been directed to changes in public education. Consideration of proposed reforms has included the provision of programs for four-year-olds. Research studies have affirmed the positive effects of prekindergarten attendance on the later development of children, and parents and educators are recognizing the need and desirability of prekindergarten programs. The Iowa General Assembly passed many educational bills in 1985, including Senate File 78 which is Section 257.10 of the Iowa Code. It was amended by the addition of Subsection 16, which identified a "five-year plan for the achievement of common and significant educational goals in Iowa." In June 1986 the State Board of Education officially adopted a statement titled "Renewing the Commitment: A Plan for Quality Education in Iowa" which highlighted implementation activities for seven goals. The third activity of the second goal was the establishment of a Prekindergarten Task Force. Such a task force was created in September 1986. Its report, contained in the following pages, was completed in May 1987. The rationale statement was added to this report in October 1987.

The report addresses the following charges: to develop recommendations for strengthening existing kindergarten programs and to design a plan for the implementation of appropriate prekindergarten programs. Basic to this report is the recognition of the inability of all families to provide the opportunity of a prekindergarten program for their children. Therefore the Task Force recommends the establishment of Iowa Department of Education prekindergartens for four-year- olds. These programs will be provided by Local Education Agencies as an option for families. Adequate lead time must be provided before such programs are mandated by the state.

Also basic to this report is the cognizance of some existing prekindergarten and kindergarten programs which do not meet the developmental needs of children, particularly those programs which focus on early academics and expect children to adjust to the demands of a specific program. Therefore the Task Force recommends that programs be tailored to meet the needs of each child, be open to all children of the target age, and be designed to help children learn by providing a "hands-on," play-oriented approach to early childhood curriculum. The Task Force strongly recommends that district kindergarten programs meet the guidelines in the following report before the implementation of programs for four-year-olds.

The report includes a Rationale for Public School for Four-Year-Olds, Position Statement, Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Classes, Guidelines for a Model for Delivery of Prekindergarten Programs, and References. The model for delivery targets school districts desiring to initiate a program for four-year-olds using an entitlement application process sponsored by the Iowa Department of Education.

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RATIONALE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL FOR FOUR-YEAR-OLDS

This rationale is based on the task force's recognition of several conditions involving the field of early childhood education.

Public involvement in early childhood programs is growing. The number of children in the United States enrolled in kindergarten has gone from 83 percent in 1964 to 96 percent in 1985 (U.S. Government, 1986). In Iowa, 39,092 five-year-olds were enrolled in public kindergarten and 3,858 enrolled in non-public kindergartens in 1986-87 (Iowa Department of Education, 1987).

The number of preschools is also on the rise, yet most are not publicly funded. In 1964, 10 percent of three- and four-year olds were enrolled in preschools compared to 39 percent in 1985 (U.S. Government, 1986). This increase is dramatically greater than the growth in kindergarten enrollments, but most preschool programs nationwide and in Iowa are not publicly funded. According to a recent survey, 20 states reported no public preschool program (Robinson, 1987). Morado (1986) reported that one-third of the states provide funds for programs for four year-olds. Most of the states providing such a program concentrated on children with exceptional needs--the poor, handicapped, and those at risk of failure--serving small numbers of children (Robinson, 1987). In Iowa there were 3,674 permanent funded enrollees in the Head Start program for the 1987-88 school year (Kansas City Regional Office; June 1987).

With federal support and control of education dwindling, many state governments are beginning to consider establishing programs to provide educational opportunities for all four-year-olds (Robinson, 1987). There are currently 725 Department of Human Services licensed preschools in Iowa (Voss and Shaw, 7 September 1987). Thirty-one of the 436 Iowa school districts provided an early childhood program for prekindergarten children in the 1986-87 school year.

Quality preschool programs have positive short- and long-term effects on children, especially those considered "at risk" of later failure (National Governors Association, 1986). During the early years there is a critical development of the social, emotional, physical, and intellectual abilities of prekindergarten children. However, children growing up in poverty are more likely than wealthier peers to lack optimal cognitive and social stimulation, and to experience parental neglect (Pelton, 1978). Prekindergarten experiences are not provided at the same level by different income level groups; young children most in need are the least likely to have a preschool opportunity provided. According to the National Governors Association (1986), only 29 percent of at-risk three- and four-year-olds were enrolled in preschool programs in 1983. Schweinhart (1985) found that 67 percent of families with incomes over $35,000 provided preschool for their children, compared to 33 percent of lower-income families.

An Extended Elementary Education Program (EEEP) in Maryland provided prekindergarten experiences for four-year-olds identified as in high risk of school failure; the preschool group scored higher on standardized achievement test gains and demonstrated an improved reading performance. In addition, EEEP children were less likely to be retained or assigned to special education classes (Language and Learning Improvement Branch, 1985).

Poverty is growing nationally and in Iowa. The number of American children who are poor increased by 2.76 million from 1978 to 1985; more than 20 percent of American children live in poverty (Children's Defense Fund, 1987). Based on several measures, poverty also seems to be increasing in Iowa. In 1980 110,773 low-income dependents were identified compared to 150,031 in 1985. The total number of free school lunches served in October, 1980, was 1,428,815, compared to 1,962,413 in October, 1986. In August, 1987, the percentage of low-income dependents in each Iowa school district was determined. These percentages were averaged by congressional districts and are as follows: Congressional District #1 - 20.16 percent, #2 - 24.61 percent, #3 - 25.09 percent, #4 - 26.67 percent, #5 - 28.49 percent, #6 - 30.13 percent (Iowa Department of Education, 26 August 1987).

A kindergarten experience provides later advantages for children. The National Governors Association (1986) reported that children with kindergarten experience indisputably perform at a higher level in first grade than those without this experience and recommended kindergarten be required for all five-year-olds. When kindergarten programs in South Carolina were studied, children who attended kindergarten were twice as ready to enter first grade compared to children without kindergarten; three times as many children without kindergarten were retained in first grade compared to kindergarten attendees (Berrueta-Clement et al., 1984).

A preschool experience can generate future savings for states. The New York Commission estimated that preschools can generate savings of $10,000 per child on remediation and $50,000 per children during a lifetime (Tugend, 2 April 1986). Woodruff found Tennessee kindergarten attendees outperformed nonattendees eight grades later; upon examination of retention rates of fifth through eighth graders, kindergarten attendees had significantly lower retention rates with an estimated cost savings to Tennessee of $2.5 million per year (Sava, 1985). According to Berrueta-Clement, et al. (1984), an investment in preschool returns seven dollars for every dollar invested the first year.

The most frequently quoted program citing gains from the preschool experience is the Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan; their longitudinal studies show that minority low income children who attended preschool had few referrals to special education programs, a decreased incidence of teenage pregnancy, a greater likelihood of high school graduation, and were more likely to participate in vocational or academic training after high school (Berrueta-Clement, et al., 1984). Spencer and Brickman (1986) found that children gained an average of 27 points in IQ during the first year of preschool; furthermore, ten years later, their IQs were higher than students with no preschool experience. The Consortium for Longitudinal Studies (Lazar and Darlington, 1982) conducted follow-up studies of low-income children from eleven early intervention programs; they found fewer placements in special education and fewer grade retentions coupled with higher graduation rates for students who had attended a high-quality early childhood program.

Salaries for teachers and caregivers have been depressed and the trend is toward continued slippage. Work with children has not been valued in the United States. According to a National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) "Fact Sheet" (1985), the average wage for all occupations in the United States was $19,358; teachers of prekindergarten and kindergarten received an average wage of $15,648; the identified level of poverty was $10,610; educational and social services child care workers received an average of $9,204; and private child care workers received $4,420. Child care workers were found to have one of the highest rates of job turnover of all occupations (NAEYC, 1985). In the female-dominated child care field, women earn only 50-78 percent of what males earn with the same level of education and hours of work (NAEYC, 1985). The National Committee on Pay Equity found child care workers to be the second most underpaid profession (Willer, 1987).

In Iowa, public schools are seeking to legitimize early childhood as a profession. This validation is occurring by establishing prekindergarten programs and placing early childhood teachers on the district's existing salary schedule with benefits based on training, education, and experience. Prekindergarten public school teachers who teach in Iowa are required to have the appropriate teaching endorsement (Endorsement 53), training, and experience.

There are advantages to public school involvement in early childhood education. In schools with declining school-age-enrollments, some public schools have classroom space for preschools (National Governors Association, 1986). Public schools have traditionally been responsible to provide educational experiences for K-12; adding prekindergarten would provide continuity of a vitally important year. Provision of public school programs for four-year-olds would also provide more possibilities for the least restrictive and most appropriate placement for all children. In Iowa an accreditation process has been established to monitor prekindergarten through grade twelve programs. Early childhood teachers would be accorded full status as teachers. As staff members, early childhood teachers could serve as advocates for the needs and interests of young children, pointing out areas of mismatch in the elementary school. In

addition, standards for certification to teach are considerably higher than in a licensed or unlicensed early childhood program. Early childhood programs in the public school have this report to use as guidelines to insure high quality and developmental appropriateness.

POSITION STATEMENT

The Prekindergarten/Kindergarten Task Force believes that high quality prekindergarten and kindergarten programs provide a safe and nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of young children while responding to the needs of families. A major determinant of program quality is the extent to which knowledge of child development is applied in program practices. High quality developmentally appropriate prekindergarten and kindergarten programs are based on the position that learning is an interactive process. These programs should be available to all prekindergarten and kindergarten children and their families. Enrollment is optional.

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES IN PREKINDERGARTEN AND KINDERGARTEN CLASSES

I. Personnel

The application of child development knowledge is vital to providing high quality prekindergarten and kindergarten programs.

Staff working with prekindergarten and kindergarten children must have appropriate training, experience, and credentials.

A. Teachers

1. Qualifications

Prekindergarten teachers shall have the state endorsement for prekindergarten/kindergarten (#53). Kindergarten teachers need either prekindergarten/kindergarten (#53) or elementary (#10) endorsement. Kindergarten teachers without endorsement #53 should be encouraged to direct their recertification training toward eligibility for that endorsement.

2. Experience

Prekindergarten teachers in these programs should have previous experience in teaching this age group.

3. Salaries

Prekindergarten teachers will be placed on the district's existing salary schedule and will receive benefits.

B. Aides

Prekindergarten aides will meet the same district qualifications as elementary aides and will be paid according to district policy.

C. Administrators

Prekindergarten and kindergarten administrators are encouraged to obtain and maintain current knowledge of child development and its application to early childhood educational practice.

D. Area Education Agency Consultants

Area Education Agency prekindergarten and kindergarten consultants shall have the state endorsement for prekindergarten/kindergarten (#53). Area Education Agency consultants in these programs shall have previous experience in teaching this age group and meet comparable Area Education Agency educational requirements. Area Education Agency prekindergarten consultants shall be located within the Educational Services Division. The number of consultants at the Area Education Agency level should be based on size and population served.

E. Department of Education Consultants

Department of Education prekindergarten and kindergarten consultants shall have the state endorsement for prekindergarten/kindergarten (#53). Department of Education consultants in these programs shall have had previous experience in teaching this age group and meet Department of Education educational requirements.

II. Eligibility and Placement

In Department of Education approved programs, there should be a place for every child of target age regardless of his/her developmental level. No program should deny access to children on the basis of results of screening or other arbitrary determinations of the child's readiness. The educational system must adjust to the developmental needs and levels of the children it serves; children must not be expected to adapt to inappropriate programs.

A. Children who are four years of age on or before September 15 are eligible for prekindergarten programs.

B. Children who are five years of age on or before September 15 are eligible for kindergarten programs.

C. These programs must be in compliance with Department of Education guidelines for ethnic and minority group enrollments.

D. These programs will provide for identification and integration of young children with special needs, handicaps, and/or at-risk.

III. Program Structure

Program structure for four- and five-year-olds differs from that found in the elementary grades as they exist in today's schools.

A. Prekindergarten programs will be in operation a minimum of 2-1/2 hours four days per week for two semesters in conjunction with the Local Education Agency calendar.

B. Kindergarten programs will be in compliance with Department of Education guidelines for the length of school day and number of days per week.

C. In prekindergarten programs a minimum of one-half day a week per half-day program will be set aside for conducting parent contacts, involvement, and participation opportunities.

D. Kindergarten programs will include a strong parent component which emphasizes working in partnership with families.

E. Prekindergarten children should be in groups of not more than 20 with two adults. The group size and ratio of teachers to children is limited to enable individualized and age-appropriate programming.

F. Kindergarten programs will be in compliance with Department of Education guidelines for group size and teacher ratio.

G. Special education aides assigned to individual children shall not be included in adult/child ratio.

H. Local Education Agencies are encouraged to consider prekindergarten/kindergarten programs that integrate multi-age grouping.

IV. Facilities and Equipment

The prekindergarten and kindergarten physical facilities and equipment shall meet the needs of the children and the instructional program.

A. The indoor and outdoor facilities and equipment for four-year-olds must be child-size and age-appropriate. There shall be a minimum of 35 square feet per child of usable floor space. There shall be a minimum of 75 square feet per child of secured outdoor play space. There shall be a minimum of one functioning toilet and one lavatory for each fifteen children, or fraction thereof.

B. Kindergarten programs will be in compliance with Department of Education guidelines for facilities and equipment.

V. Curriculum

A developmentally appropriate curriculum for prekindergarten and kindergarten children is planned to be appropriate for the age span of the children within the group and to be implemented with attention to the different needs, interests, and developmental levels of those individual children. This plan develops children's self-esteem and a positive attitude toward learning.

A. A developmentally appropriate curriculum provides experiences that meet children's needs and that stimulate learning in all developmental areas -- physical, social, emotional, and intellectual through an integrated approach.

B. Appropriate curriculum planning is based on the teacher's knowledge of child development and on observations and recordings of each child's needs, interests, and developmental progress.

C. Curriculum planning is based on the position that learning is an interactive process. The curriculum is designed to provide for children's exploration and manipulation of the environment through meaningful interaction with adults, other children, and materials.

D. Learning activities and materials are concrete, real and/or representational, and relevant to the lives of young children.

E. Teachers provide a variety of activities and materials and increase the difficulty, complexity, and challenge of an activity as children are involved with it, and as children develop understanding and skills.

F. Adults provide opportunities for children to explore through active involvement with a variety of activities, materials, and equipment.

G. Multicultural and nonsexist experiences, materials, and equipment are provided for children of all ages.

H. Adults provide a balance of quiet and active experiences for children throughout the program day.

I. Outdoor experiences are provided daily for children of all ages.

VI. Adult-Child Interaction

The quality of prekindergarten/kindergarten programs is primarily determined by the appropriateness of the adult-child interactions. Recommended interactions at the prekindergarten and kindergarten levels are age- and individual-appropriate.

A. Adults respond to children's needs, desires, and messages in a way that respects their individual characteristics and abilities.

B. Adults provide varied opportunities for children to communicate in many ways.

C. Adults recognize that children learn from trial and error, and that children's misconceptions reflect their developing thinking abilities. Adults facilitate a child's successful completion of developmentally appropriate tasks by providing support, focused attention, physical proximity, and verbal encouragement.

D. Teachers are alert to causes and signs of undue stress in children's behavior. They incorporate appropriate stress-reducing activities and techniques.

E. Adults facilitate the development of self-esteem by expressing acceptance, respect, and comfort for the child, regardless of the child's gender, race, religion, language, cultural or socioeconomic background, or handicap.

F. Adults facilitate the development of self-control and independence in children.

G. Adults are responsible for all children under their supervision at all times.

VII. Teaching Strategies

Children's disposition to learn is a natural result of the teacher's capitalizing on their innate curiosity and desire to make sense of their world. Developmentally appropriate teaching strategies encourage a balance between child-initiated and teacher-directed activities. Teachers prepare the environment to enable children to learn through active exploration and interaction with materials, other children, and adults.

A. Children in this teacher-prepared environment:

1. are free to select their own activities from a variety of learning centers;

2. are allowed to be physically, socially, and mentally active; and

3. may work individually, in a small group, or in the total group.

B. Teachers in this teacher-prepared environment:

1. provide concrete learning activities which include materials and resource persons relevant to the children's life experiences;

2. facilitate children's involvement by promoting conversation and inquiry and by moving about and offering suggestions, ideas, and/or materials to extend children's participation and social and intellectual growth. In so doing, teachers confirm that there is often more than one appropriate response or solution, and that children learn from self-directed problem solving involving trial-and-error experimentation;

3. use strategies such as modeling, questioning, discussion, and direct instruction to promote child growth and development;

4. adjust their expectations to match and respect individual children's developing capabilities; and

5. encourage role playing and sociodramatic play.

C. Daily learning experiences include the following:

1. Opportunities for children to foster and enhance self-esteem.

   a. Teachers provide a positive classroom environment that allows children to experience success.

   b. Teachers provide activities and materials encompassing a wide range of abilities and developmental levels.

   c. Teachers communicate acceptance, respect, and comfort for each child regardless of gender, race, religion, language, cultural or socioeconomic background, or handicap.

   d. Teachers appreciate the uniqueness of each child.

2. Opportunities for children to develop inner discipline and self-control.

   a. Teachers use positive guidance techniques such as modeling, redirecting, setting clear and reasonable limits, and encouraging appropriate behavior.

   b. Teachers provide a daily classroom schedule that offers a balance of active and quiet activities, individual and group activities, indoor and outdoor activities, and smooth transitions.

3. Opportunities for children to develop emerging literacy skills building on their language development.

   a. Teachers provide intentional programming to develop communication skills that respond to the differences among children in ability, experience, and language development.

b. Teachers provide children with meaningful experiences such as listening to stories and poems, taking field trips, dictating "stories" which are recorded for class or individual use, talking informally with other children and adults, and experimenting with writing by drawing, copying, and using inventive spelling.

c. Teachers provide an oral, visual, and print-rich environment as part of the planned instruction, which includes both receptive and expressive activities.

4. Opportunities for children to develop concepts and understandings about themselves, others, and the world around them.

a. Teachers facilitate concept development by providing opportunities for children to observe, explore, manipulate, interact, and solve concrete problems.

b. Teachers provide an integrated approach to emerging learning in math, science, social studies, language, and health through meaningful activities.

c. Teachers help children understand the world around them by utilizing various indoor and outdoor environments.

d. Teachers provide activities and materials which encourage multicultural and nonsexist experiences.

5. Opportunities for children to develop gross and fine motor skills.

a. Teachers provide planned indoor and outdoor daily activities to develop gross motor skills.

b. Teachers provide materials, manipulatives, and activities to develop fine motor skills.

6. Opportunities for children to engage in esthetic expression and appreciation.

a. Teachers provide various forms of music, art, drama, and movement activities to enrich the lives of children daily.

b. Teachers provide opportunities which encourage children to express their ideas and feelings creatively daily.

VIII. Assessment of Children

Assessment of individual children's development and learning is essential for planning and implementing developmentally appropriate programs.

A. Assessment addresses growth in the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual areas.

1. Assessment is an ongoing process.

2. Assessments of young children should include observations and written anecdotal records of children in individual activities, group settings, informal play situations, and adult-directed activities.

3. Information from family members concerning children's home activities is included as part of the relevant data used in the assessment process.

B. The results of assessment enable the following:

1. Planning and adapting curriculum to match the developmental needs of children.

2. Facilitating the sharing of information among teachers, other professionals, and family members.

3. Identifying children who have special needs and/or are at-risk.

4. Evaluating the program's effectiveness.

C. The following appropriate practices are to be highlighted:

1. Use of more than one source of information when making program placement decisions for any young child.

2. Use of more than one source of information when making curricular decisions for any young child.

3. When used, standardized tests should be appropriate to the child's age, culture, gender, language, socioeconomic level, and be disability specific.

IX. Home and Program Partnership

To achieve individually appropriate programs for young children, teachers and families work in partnership to build mutual understanding and greater consistency.

A. Teachers are responsible for establishing and maintaining frequent contact with families utilizing formal and informal, oral and written methods of communication.

B. Parents have both the right and the responsibility to share in decisions about their child's care and education, and to participate in the program.

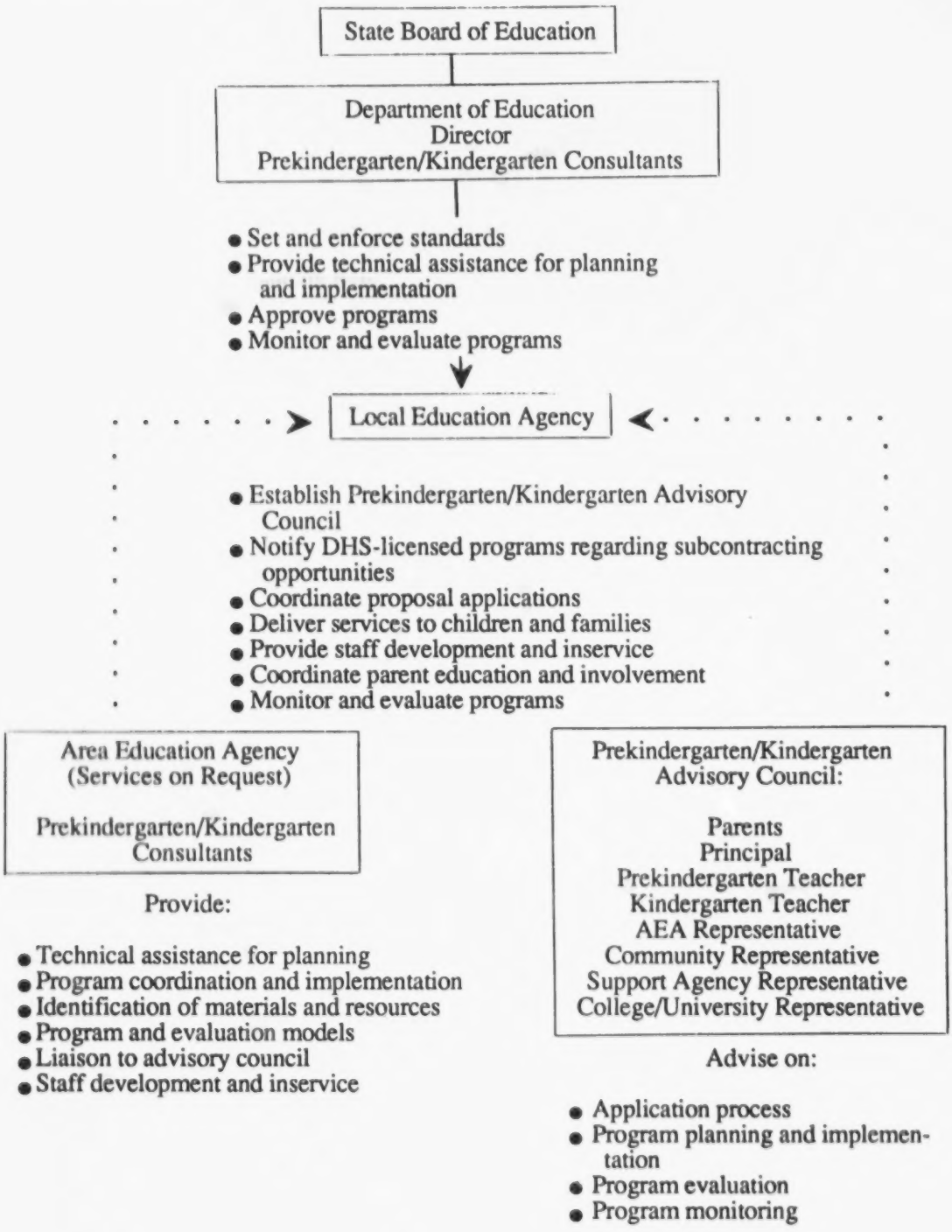
C. Teachers encourage parents to observe and participate in their child's education.

D. Teachers and family members share child development knowledge, insights, and resources as part of regular communication, conferences, and planned meetings.

E. Family members, teachers, consultants, and representatives of agencies and programs who have educational responsibility for the child share information about the child.

GUIDELINES FOR A MODEL FOR DELIVERY OF PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

I. Model for Delivery of Prekindergarten Programs



II. Funding

A. Funding will be provided through an entitlement application process.

B. Department of Education selection criteria of programs for funding will include:

1. Evidence of compliance with the Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Classes developed by the Iowa Prekindergarten/Kindergarten Task Force, May 1987.

2. Evidence of collaborative efforts across agencies, including Department of Human Services licensed prekindergarten programs.

3. Evidence of the establishment of a local prekindergarten/kindergarten advisory council.

C. Upon approval and subsequent program implementation, enrolled four-year-olds will be counted to receive district monies allocated on a per pupil formula presently in use for 5-to 18-year-olds.

III. Facilities and Equipment

The district may subcontract prekindergarten facilities and equipment with area preschools and early childhood centers.

IV. Program Evaluation

A. The prekindergarten staff will conduct an ongoing program review and submit to the Local Education Agency an annual written report regarding compliance with Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Classes.

B. A minimum of two on-site observations of the program will be conducted by the Local Education Agency annually.

C. The Local Education Agency and Prekindergarten Advisory Council will review program reports to determine compliance with Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Classes.

D. The Local Education Agency will submit program evaluation reports as requested by the Department of Education.

E. The Department of Education will review written reports to determine compliance with Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Classes.

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